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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 003180

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SUBJECT: DAS ERIC JOHN MEETS THAKSIN,S ORACLE

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce for reason 1.4(d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. On May 22, EAP/DAS Eric John and the Ambassador visited caretaker Prime Minister Thaksin,s chief political advisor, Pansak Vinyaratn. Pansak railed against the Thai courts for their decision to annul the April elections. Pansak suggested that it was time for the USG to make a public statement on its position with regard to the current state of democracy in Thailand. He accused a small cabal of advisors in the palace of twisting the King,s words to force Thaksin,s resignation. He said that Thaksin resumed his duties as caretaker Prime Minister this week primarily to ensure that the Thai economy remains stable - a matter of strong personal interest to Thaksin. He maintained that Thaksin will campaign as a Thai Rak Thai party member in the upcoming election. END SUMMARY.

THE LAW IS AN ASS

¶2. (C) On May 22, EAP/DAS Eric John and the Ambassador visited caretaker Prime Minister Thaksin,s chief political advisor, Pansak Vinyaratn. In his colorful, often poetic fashion, Pansak blasted the Thai courts for their decision to annul April,s parliamentary elections. His criticism focused mainly on the court,s justification for its ruling. "If you want to do bad things" he said, "you must do them with a sense of style. If you don,t, the serfs won't understand."

¶3. (C) Pansak then condemned the court verdict as crude and undemocratic. In anatomical terms, he portrayed the ruling as based on the physical orientation of the voter,s buttocks. (Note: Pansak was referring to the ruling that, because of the positioning of ballot boxes during the April 2 election, voters backs' were facing outward such that polling officials and the general public could see how the ballot was marked. End note.) He accused the opposition and the courts of undermining democratic principles. Pansak noted that the opposition chose to boycott the elections and, further, that they took advantage of their democratic rights to campaign actively against the election process. When that tactic failed them, the opposition declared that the elections were illegal.

¶4. Pansak suggested that it was time for the USG to make a public statement about the "regression of Thailand to a quasi-monarchy". He argued that the US "got the tablet from God" and the time is ripe to issue a "subtle reminder" focusing on "democratic principles" and the dangers of political manipulation of the court system. He further noted that, "when you talk to us, you talk to the Burmese Generals. And they hear your silence."

INTERPRETING THE KING - YET ANOTHER VERSION

¶4. (C) Asked about the circumstances behind Thaksin,s decision to step down as Prime Minister, Pansak accused a small cabal of advisors in the palace of interpreting the King,s words and actions to force Thaksin,s resignation. He said that Privy Councilor Prem Tinsulanonda (whom Pansak referred to as the "Monarch, Jr.") was a key player in this group. He said that Prem viewed Thaksin as an "inappropriate" Prime Minister because he did not share enough with the "old power groups" in Bangkok. He also asserted that Prem rarely meets directly with the King.

¶5. (C) Pansak reaffirmed that Thaksin had intended to withdraw from politics all along, but that he wanted to leave in a credible, face-saving manner. When Thaksin told the King, during their April 4 meeting, that he was willing to resign, the King nodded and then ended the meeting. It was only later that Thaksin received a phone call from one of the King,s advisors telling him that the nod, meant that he should resign immediately. Pansak lamented that "Thaksin took the King,s ephemeral statements too seriously" and was thus manipulated by the King,s advisors. Asked if he thought Prem and his confederates were acting independent of the monarch, Pansak said, "Yes. The King is never that explicit." Nevertheless, he noted, the outcome is favorable

for the King as it allows him to maintain plausible deniability of any interference in the democratic process while appearing as the stabilizing force in Thai democracy. In the end, according to Pansak, "whichever serf wins, he will give credit to the King."

THAKSIN,S FUTURE

¶ 16. (C) Asked about Thaksin,s decision to resume his duties as caretaker Prime Minister, Pansak said that his main objective is to ensure a stable domestic economy. He noted that Thaksin's livelihood depends on the Thai economy because much of his wealth is held in Thai baht.

¶ 17. (C) He maintained that Thaksin will campaign as a Thai Rak Thai party member in the upcoming election. Pansak said that it is possible for Thaksin to come back to power even with the current King on the throne. He said Thaksin will likely run as a party member, leaving open the question of whether he would accept the post of Prime Minister. In the end, Pansak argued, Thaksin must return to power to solidify his own integrity. Once back in power, he can leave on his own terms and with his credibility intact.

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A CABAL

¶ 19. (C) COMMENT: Pansak,s confidence in Thaksin,s ability to stay in power remains unwavering. His usual flair for biting analysis laced with off-color commentary was subdued (for him) during this meeting - perhaps a reflection of the current cooling-off period between the main political adversaries. His theory of a palace cabal acting independent of the King sounds farfetched. But it is just the kind of story that would salve Thaksin,s wounded ego and steel him for the coming election campaign. End Comment.

¶ 10. DAS Eric John has not had the opportunity to clear on this cable.

BOYCE